



Chan, C. (2017). Review of Little Manila Is In The Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California. *Itinerario- European Journal of Overseas History*.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511531700050X>

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to published version (if available):
[10.1017/S016511531700050X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511531700050X)

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Little Manila Is In The Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California

By Dawn Bohulano Mabalon. London: Duke University Press, 2013.

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The establishment of Western colonies in Asia during and after the fifteenth century opened the doors to an unprecedented wave of human movement across transnational borders. This set off not only new encounters between different cultures and ethnicities, but also resulted in ideas of 'miscegenation,' racism and exploitation, often towards 'non-white' populations. Dawn Bohulano Mabalon's account of the Filipino American community in Stockton falls into this larger picture of ethnic tension, identity negotiation and rigid social hierarchy. Reconstructing the history of this community from a human-centered approach, *Little Manila Is In The Heart* weaves personal and collective experiences and their responses to international events through three main themes: the process of racialization and cultural transformation of provincial immigrants into modern Filipino Americans, the connection between race, place and space in shaping this identity during the twentieth century and finally, the politics of historical memory and the urban landscape.

In the first part of *Little Manila Is In The Heart*, Mabalon recounted the earliest transformation of Filipinos in Stockton from individual settlers to conscious members of a strengthening ethnic community. The first group of Filipinos/*indios* left a recently re-colonized Philippines in search of better work prospects in the United States of America. Impoverished and uneducated, the Filipinos toiled in plantations and were divided by both housing arrangements and the fact that most people could only speak their native dialects. Gradually, smaller communities began to emerge: within the plantations, the Filipinos shared common grievances of being situated at the bottom of the caste system; after work, native activities like *escrima* and cockfighting were brought into Stockton and bonded some Filipinos. As the number of Filipinos continued to grow in Stockton, a sense of community grew with the emergence of social and labor organizations, Filipino newspapers, the rise of boxing and Filipino boxers and escalating social segregation between the 'whites' and the 'colored.' As the consciousness of being 'Filipino' grew stronger by the day, the desire to be American was not forgotten and achieved through urban lifestyles and Fourth of July celebrations.

Between the 1930s and 1960s, the Filipinos of Stockton continued to negotiate their Filipino American identities by shifting towards 'Americanness.' For one, women were empowered with new roles that allowed them more freedom and authority: from beauty pageants to managing private businesses, women challenged the traditional ideal of women as quiet, demure and 'Oriental.' In looking for partners, Filipino women preferred 'white' gentlemen to fellow Filipino men. In religion, many Filipinos gave up Catholicism and converted to Protestantism. This resulted in a divergence within Stockton's Filipino community between conservative-minded first generation migrants and their younger counterparts: discussions, for instance, were made suggesting that

beauty queens should uphold the Filipino standards of womanhood. Despite the rising tension in the process of constructing the Filipino American identity, social events and external factors also influenced the future of this production. In 1939, a large-scale strike for wage increase demonstrated unprecedented solidarity within the Filipino community of Stockton and during the Second World War, shifting racial discourses in favor of the Filipinos and their war contributions renewed the public image of the Filipinos as heroic American allies and 'good' Asians. Public spaces therefore became important platforms for the Stockton *pinoy*s to gradually mold a hybrid Filipino-American identity that was sometimes conflicting and overlapping: beauty pageants commercialized women and sex as much as they served as a space for the 'modern' Filipina and the conservative Filipino to achieve their own interests.

In the last part of *Little Manila Is In The Heart*, the disappearance of the Filipino town in Stockton concluded Malabon's main intention of recording its history. After the end of the Second World War, Stockton's Filipino community exploded with new comers as more Filipinos and Filipinas arrived, many of whom had received considerable education back home. A clearer social hierarchy and ideological differences emerged, particularly resulting from a lack of mutual trust between the old and new migrants. When a Filipino ran for public office, the old Filipinos initially supported their trusted Italian American candidate. In a post-colonial context, the old 'Pilipino' was reconstructed as the new 'Filipino;' political awareness strengthened both in the Philippines and in Stockton's Filipino community. Through decades of contact and negotiation, the Filipino community in Stockton finally, during the early 1970s, made peace and found solidarity in a more unified identity bound by the Tagalog and English languages, Filipino values of hospitality and kinship and a selective American urban culture. Although urban redevelopment eventually destroyed Little Manila, Malabon showed how revisiting nostalgic streets, looking at old pictures and documenting personal and collective stories can preserve memories that will for a long time be associated with Stockton in the hearts of many Filipinos.

The case of Stockton echoes a larger pattern of transnational network and colonial system that helped shape Asia in the twentieth century: widespread diaspora, the rise of an urban culture, the emergence of public spheres, the use of English as a shared lingua franca and on the down side, rigid social hierarchies, highly racialized mindsets and eventually, identity awareness and reconstruction. All of these factors interacted to construct modern Asia and for many Asian nations, new, hybrid identities independent but not absent of their colonial pasts. For Stockton's Filipino communities, two recurring ideas- a memory of home in the Philippines and the American dream thread together the stories of the *pinoy* migrants throughout the century. The histories of colonization and diaspora, therefore, are more than accounts of migrant workers, political struggles or social negotiations but from a human-centered approach, they are made up of the piecemeal histories of communities and human lives. *Little Manila In The Heart* showed how colonial empires connected space, race and place as much as people, memory and emotions served as invisible links between these abstract dimensions.